

Judicial Council of California

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The 27-member Judicial Council is the policy-making body of the California courts, the largest court system in the nation. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice and in accordance with the California Constitution, the council is responsible for ensuring the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. The Administrative Office of the Courts serves as the staff agency to the council.

The council is directly responsible for:

- Establishing direction and setting priorities for the continuous improvement of the court system;
- Promulgating rules of court administration, practice, and procedure;
- Sponsoring and taking positions on legislation that affects the California judicial system;
- Approving budgets for the California judicial branch;
- Approving reports to the Legislature; and
- Responding to appropriate mandates from the Legislature.

DIVERSITY IS KEY TO MEMBERSHIP

New judicial members of the council and its committees are selected by a nominating procedure intended to attract applicants from throughout the legal system. Diversity of experience, gender, ethnic background, and geography are among the criteria for selection.

The 21 voting members of the Judicial Council

consist of: the Chief Justice; 14 judges appointed by the Chief Justice; 4 attorney members appointed by the State Bar Board of Governors; and 1 member from each house of the Legislature. The council also has 6 advisory members, including representatives of state court administrative agencies.

Staggered terms, with one-third of the council's membership changing each year, ensure continuity while creating opportunities for new participation and input.

MAJOR IMPROVEMENTS ACHIEVED IN COURT ADMINISTRATION

The Judicial Council has brought many historic improvements to the California court system. Detailed information about these achievements can be found by visiting the California Courts Web site at www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/. Among the highlights:

- *Securing funding for trial courts:* After decades of judicial council advocacy, trial court funding responsibility moved from counties to the state with the historic Lockyer-Isenberg Trial Court Funding Act of 1997.
- *Advancing trial court unification:* Passed by 64 percent of voters in the June 1998 statewide election, Proposition 220 provides for the voluntary unification of the superior and municipal courts of any California county into one countywide superior court in order to improve service to the public and increase

flexibility for the courts. Judges in almost all counties have voted for unification.

- *Reforming the jury system:* The council has sponsored legislation carrying out recommendations proposed by its Blue Ribbon Commission on Jury System Improvement. New legislation requires all trial courts to adopt a one-day/one-trial jury system by January 2000. Other task forces are studying ways to improve statewide jury operations and drafting civil and criminal jury instructions that accurately state the law and are understandable to jurors.

- *Increasing access and fairness in state courts:* The council has made significant progress in improving access and fairness for minorities, including persons with disabilities, by developing numerous court outreach and education programs.

- *Expanding court interpreter services:* The council is implementing a comprehensive court interpreter program to increase the number and quality of interpreters. The daily compensation for certified and registered interpreters in criminal proceedings was raised.

- *Helping children and families:* Many far-reaching efforts are under way to expedite court processes, services, and support for families in crises.

Improving court technology: The Judicial Council fosters the use of new technologies that speed the flow of information, improve accuracy, and expand access to the judicial system. Its Advisory Committee on Court Technology is establishing standards to ensure technological compatibility; overseeing court technology

projects funded by the state; proposing rules, standards, or legislation to ensure privacy, access, and security; and assisting courts in acquiring and developing useful technology systems.

- *Reaching out to communities:* The Task Force on Court/Community Outreach was created in 1997 to involve the public in the future of the courts and to maintain a strong and independent judiciary. The task force provided all California courts with a comprehensive handbook containing ideas, resources, and tools for improving local outreach

STRATEGIC PLANNING

The Judicial Council's Long-Range Strategic Plan for the California judicial system, *Leading Justice Into the Future*, contains a detailed action plan for the council's advisory committees and its staff agency, the Administrative Office of the Courts. The plan sets forth the council's vision of a judicial system that is responsible for managing the fair administration of justice across the state while encouraging local management and discretion in court operations.

The Judicial Council's six goals are to improve

1. Access, fairness, and diversity;
2. Independence and accountability;
3. Modernization of management and administration;
4. Quality of justice and service to the public;
5. Education; and
6. Technology.

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